

WHAT COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS AND SMARTER BALANCED EXAMS MEAN TO YOU AND YOUR STUDENTS

Today's students are preparing to enter a world in which colleges and businesses are demanding more than ever before. In our own state, we have 25,000 unfilled jobs for highly skilled workers — and that number is projected to grow to 50,000 by 2017.

To ensure all students are ready for success after high school, Common Core State Standards were established. They provide clear, consistent guidelines for what every student should know and be able to do in math and English language arts from kindergarten through 12th grade. Smarter Balanced exams, which are aligned to the new standards, provide a way for teachers to measure student progress on those standards throughout the year and ensure that students are on the pathway to success. The exams are administered in grades 3 – 8 and 11.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS:

- **What are Smarter Balanced exams?** Smarter Balanced is a high-quality assessment system aligned to Common Core that provides accurate information and tools for teachers and counselors to help students succeed. The new exams are better at measuring what students really know and can do. They emphasize how students apply the math and English concepts they are learning to real world problems and rely less on memorization of facts. The Smarter Balanced assessment system includes formative and summative assessments to measure student growth and adjust classroom lessons to student learning needs. Smarter Balanced end-of-year assessments will be administered in the last 12 weeks of the school year.
- **What does college- and career-ready mean?** Being college- and career-ready means that a high school graduate has the skills needed to qualify for and succeed in credit-bearing college courses and/or in the postsecondary job training necessary for their chosen career. Common Core helps ensure students are ready for either path.
- **What do the Smarter Balanced scores mean?** Students are scored on a 1 to 4 scale. Students who score a 3 or 4 are on target to be college- and career-ready by the end of 12th grade. The timely information can be used to help prepare and plan so students can be successful throughout their education, including the often-challenging transitions to high school and college.



- **What happens if an 11th grade student earns a high score (3 or 4)?** A score of 3 or 4 means students are likely to avoid remedial, or pre-college courses in college, saving money and time. They may enroll in specific credit-bearing college level courses in English or math.
- **What happens if an 11th grade student earns a low score (1 or 2)?** A score of a 1 or 2 does NOT disqualify a student from attending college. Students can reduce the time and expense of remediation by working hard during 12th grade and taking advantage of transition courses designed to get students on a path to college- and career-readiness.
- **What happens if an 8th grade student earns a high score (3 or 4)?** They're on the college- and career-ready path. It's important they stay on that trajectory by taking more rigorous courses including opportunities to earn college credit through Running Start, Advanced Placement, or other dual-credit options, in their later high school years.
- **What happens if an 8th grade student earns a low score (1 or 2)?** Low scores are a sign a student might need extra help to be on the pathway to college- and career-readiness. Students should work with their high school counselor to ensure they are enrolled in a course of study that will get them college- and career-ready by the end of 12th grade.
- **How can parents and guardians stay involved in preparing their students for college- and career-readiness?** The High School & Beyond Plan is designed to bring parent/guardians, educators, and students together to develop each student's personalized pathway toward college- and career-readiness. Each student maintains a plan that outlines education and career goals, and the courses, exams, and experiences necessary to get them there. This is a great way for parents to stay involved in the key decisions shaping their student's postsecondary options.
- **What is the timeline?** Common Core was fully implemented in Washington school districts in the 2013-14 school year. Beginning in 2014-15, students will take Smarter Balanced exams in math and English language arts that are aligned to Common Core.
- **How will Smarter Balanced scores compare to current state exams?** Smarter Balanced exams measure a new college- and career-ready benchmark, which are generally higher than previous state exams. As a result, scores may initially seem lower but the exams will give teachers much better information about both what students know and how to better help them achieve success along their chosen pathway.

RESOURCES:

The websites below provide more information about Common Core, Smarter Balanced, and the skills that students need to succeed:

- Ready Washington: www.readywa.org
- Ready, Set, Grad interactive college planning website: www.readysetgrad.org
- OSPI's Common Core section: www.k12.wa.us/CoreStandards
- Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium: www.smarterbalanced.org
- Common Core State Standards: www.corestandards.org
- Implementing Common Core and the role of the school counselor: www.achieve.org/files/RevisedCounselorActionBrief_Final_Feb.pdf
- Informative three-minute video and Myths & Facts about Common Core: www.corestandards.org/about-the-standards/myths-vs-facts
- Career Guidance Washington: www.k12.wa.us/SecondaryEducation/careerCollegeReadiness

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